Fact Sheet No. 4

Ross Complex Superfund Site

JULY 1990

Bonneville
POWER ADMINISTRATION

May Scoping Meeting Produced Good Questions and Comments

As you may know, BPA's Ross Complex was designated a Superfund Site last fall. We are just beginning public review and cleanup studies.

Thanks to those of you who came to the May 22, scoping meeting. About 40 people, mostly neighbors of the Ross Complex attended. We were very pleased with the turnout and the quality of the questions and comments received.

The purpose of the meeting was twofold:

1. To provide information.

2. To hear your concerns about environmental conditions at the site.

All of the questions and comments will be used to help Bonneville make decisions about site studies and cleanup. Right now, the comments will help us determine the scope of environmental studies.

This fact sheet summarizes the questions and comments we received and provides answers. Let us know if you have other questions or concerns about the site.

Scoping Meeting Questions and Answers

Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)

Q. Are PCBs used at the Ross Complex?

A. PCBs are still used at the site in older capacitors and transformers. There are 9 PCB Transformers and about 2270 PCB capacitors in use - all inaccessible to the public. Since 1980, Bonneville has purchased only non-PCB filled equipment. We have rigorous procedures for preventing PCB spills and for cleaning them up on the rare occasion that they happen.

Q. Why is there so much concern over PCBs? The PCB issue has been blown out of proportion.

A. BPA is concerned because information currently available to us shows that PCBs may pose potential hazards if they are released to the environment. Once humans or animals injest PCB's, they are stored permenently in fatty tissues, posing a serious health threat. Also, Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Department of Ecology regulations require us to clean up PCBs.

Q. Why are PCBs used in electrical equipment? Why not use Ethylene Glycol?

A. PCBs are used in electrical equipment because they have low flamability, low electrical conductivity and other characteristics needed for such equipment. PCBs are harmful to the environment because they don't degrade easily. Phenyl Xylyl Ethane (PXE) is the best known substitute in capacitors. Ethylene Glycol is not a suitable substitute, because it will conduct electricity.

Spills and Dumps

Q. How many Superfund sites does BPA have?

A. The Ross Complex is the only BPA site on the National Priorities List.

Q. Has dumping and spilling been going on since 1939?

A. To some degree, yes, although the pollutants that concern us most were released during the 1960's and 1970's, when the power system expanded rapidly and equipment from the 1940's began wearing out. Since the early 1980's, hazardous substances have been carefully used and disposed of consistent with regulatory permits.

Study and Cleanup Costs

Q. Will the project be funded by BPA? Is Bonneville committed to paying whatever is necessary to clean up the site?

A. The costs of the cleanup project will be funded entirely by BPA.

Q. How much will the RI/FS study cost?

A. The site study (Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study or RI/FS) will cost between $750,000 and $1 million.

Q. How much of the cleanup cost will be borne by industrial customers and how much by ratepayers? Will a rate increase be needed?

A. The cost will be paid by all of the BPA ratepayers. This project alone is unlikely to cause a rate increase.

Source of Contamination

Q. Is it known that degreasing solvents in the ground water came from Ross or is it possible that another industry is responsible?

A. We suspect, but are not certain, that the solvents in at least one test well originated on site. The studies should give us definitive answers about the sources of contamination.

Water Monitoring and Studies

Q. Will off-site, down-gradient wells be monitored during the study?

A. The Remedial Investigation will include monitoring of off-site, down-gradient wells. Monitoring will continue for at least five years after the site is cleaned up.

Q. Are test wells currently being monitored?

A. Periodic monitoring (sampling and analysis) of on-site wells is being conducted. Fact sheet No. 3 gives the results of the tests.

Q. Is the surface water being monitored, in particular, Cold Creek?

A. Surface water in Cold Creek and Burnt Bridge Creek was analyzed in 1987. No detectable levels of solvents were found. Additional monitoring will be done during the Remedial Investigation this summer and fall.

Q. What are the depths to ground water at the test wells?

A. The depths to groundwater range from 27 to 160 feet from ground level at the well. Most of the wells reach water at between 129 and 166 feet. The hydrology beneath the site is quite complex and variable. We expect that our studies will give us a clearer picture of water location, flows, and quality.

Q. Will computer modeling of the site be done?

A. Computer modeling may or may not be done, depending on initial well monitoring results. Modeling will be done if it is needed to explain site geohydrology and better predict rates of contaminant migration.

Q. Is BPA familiar with a computer modeling study currently underway by Clark County?

A. Yes, and we will use the results if they are relevant to the problems at Ross.

Risks to Human Health and the Environment

Q. Are there any studies to determine the risks to the community due to air or water-borne contaminants? (There were concerns expressed by people who grew up near the site or have children that play there.)

A. Two earlier studies, (Preliminary Asessment and Site Inspection) identified pollutants at the site. Neither of these studies have identified any immediate risks to the community. During the Remedial Investigation, air monitoring equipment will be installed in and around the Ross Complex to measure air-borne pollutants. Surface and groundwater will also be sampled and analyzed. A Risk Assessment will be conducted.

Q. Why is the area still open to the public?

A. To date we don't know of any harmful exposure risks on any areas of the site that are unfenced and open to the public. Of course, any significant risks identified will be addressed immediately.

Q. Will solvents affect fruit trees?

A. Our studies will determine if contaminants at the site pose risks to fruit trees. No information currently available indicates that any risks exist.

Q. Children play in the area - can they be harmed?

A. Our current information indicates that there are no risks to children playing in the area.

Q. If the Fog Test site is a dangerous waste site, why isn't it fenced off? Anyone can have access to it now.

A. There is no surface contamination at the Fog Chamber site. All pollutants are buried several feet below the surface.

Q. Have there been any emergency measures taken so far to prevent surface water or windborne contamination?

A. No emergency measures have been necessary. Almost all of the pollutants are under the soil surface and do not appear to pose a risk. The few surface pollutants are unlikely to be carried away by wind or water.

Waste Disposal

Q. Where will contaminated materials from the Ross Complex be disposed of? Are there rules or laws governing this disposal?

A. The Feasibility Study will investigate various options for disposal of contaminated materials. They may be disposed of off site, or they may be treated to render them harmless on site. Regulations governing disposal and treatment of such materials are very strict today. Our cleanup work will follow the current disposal requirements.

Q. How much material has been deposited at the Circle C site in Clark County? Will that site be addressed along with any remediation that may take place at Ross?

A. Materials deposited by BPA at Circle C, a Vancouver area landfill, were not regulated and our records do not give exact types and amounts. Investigations of the Circle C landfill is not part of this process. BPA will cooperate with any Circle C studies.

Q. Where was soil taken that was excavated during construction activities at the Ross Complex?

A. Soil excavated during construction of the Dittmer Control Center, DOB-1 and 2 Sanitary drainfields, Utilization and Disposal Paving Project, and grading for the Top Coat Test Area were deposited as fill on BPA property in the Cold Creek Canyon.

Public Information

Q. Will we keep adjacent property owners on the mailing list? Can data from the RI/FS be sent to members of the community?

A. Yes, adjacent property owners will be kept on the mail list. We will periodically send fact sheets summarizing information. All information from the studies will be available for public review at the Vancouver Public Library and the Dittmer Control Center at the Ross Complex following EPA approval of the work plan. Data obtained during the studies will be summarized in the two reports: (1) Feasibility Study; and (2) Environmental Impact Statement. Each of these studies will be made available in draft for public review and comment.

Q. If or when new dumps are found will the public notified?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you commit to how often we will receive a fact sheet? Will we have to wait six months before you tell us anything more?

A. We plan to distribute fact sheets to the community as project milestones are reached and if new findings are made. We expect to mail fact sheets at least quarterly.

Q. Have you considered placing warning signs around the perimeter of the complex?

A. We will sign the area with warnings if the studies show that site contaminants pose risks.

Property Values

Q. If need be, will you consider purchasing adjacent property to remediate contamination?

A. So far, we don't think adjacent properties have been affected. Any consideration of

property purchases will follow from the results of the Remedial Investigation.

Q. How will the status of the Ross Complex as a Superfund Site affect property values now, and 4 years from now?

A. We don't know how property values will be affected. They will be addressed as an element of the Environmental Impact Statement. EPA believes that Superfund cleanups protect property values.

Q. Will land development be adversely affected by the site?

A. The effect on land use will be studied as part of the Environmental Impact Statement.

Mitigation Measures

Q. Is there anything that will neutralize TCA, a degreasing solvent?

A. A number of technologies are available to destroy TCA (Trichloroethane). Biotreatment can convert TCA to non-toxic byproducts; carbon absorption and air stripping can remove TCA from water; soil venting or washing can remove TCA from soils. Each of these cleanup measures will be considered during the feasibility study.

Q. Will anything be done in the way of dust control?

A. Yes. We currently use dust control measures.

Q. Have any measures been taken to prevent solvent movement (i.e., covering the ground?)

A. Well Site MW-4A, near the oil storage tanks, is suspected of having significant solvent spillage. Based on this question, we plan to cover the ground around the well with plastic to prevent possible leaching of the solvents.

Comments Received So Far

As of July 1, we have received the following written comments.

- Consider cleaning up parts of the site before the studies are complete.
- Make a total clean-up with no environmental hazards left for my grandchildren. Don't be concerned about a rate increase.
- Make sure the food chain is safe, including water for irrigating gardens, fish in Burnt Bridge and Cold Creeks and birds.
- BPA needs to be sensitive to public interests and use effective methods, in addition to the media, to distribute information to Clark County residents.
- Chemical compounds need to be described in simple terms to help people understand their effects and potential risks.
- BPA needs to describe how Ross's goundwater is separated from drinking water supplies, what risk exists for leakage or spillover in to city supplies and if the city is monitoring water for contaminents.
- In the early 70's TCA, a degreasing solvent was dumped by the gallons in the storm drain by the old "Tool Room". (From a former BPA employee).

We encourage you to give us your comments, ideas and concerns at any time. They are all read and considered and help us do a better job.

What's Next?

A work plan and fact sheet describing the details of the RI/FS will be available in late August. Work may begin at the site in September. Please phone if you have questions.

If you would like to be placed on a mailing list, share ideas, request fact sheets or just learn more about this project, contact:

John Straub, Ross Facility Manager, Bonneville Power Administration, 5411 NE Highway 99, Dittmer Control Center, Vancouver, WA 98666, (206) 690-2070

You may also contact BPA's Public Involvement office in Portland. Telephone numbers, voice/TTY, for the Public Involvement office are: (503) 230-3478 in Portland; toll free (800) 452-8429 for Oregon outside of Portland; (800) 547-6048 for Washington, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, and California. You may also send comments to Public Involvement Manager, Bonneville Power Administration, Post Office Box 12999, Portland, Oregon 97212

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